

I. FASTING (Inspired and influenced by the book A Hunger for God by John Piper)

– *“The state of the times extremely requires a fullness of the divine Spirit in ministers, and we ought to give ourselves no rest till we have obtained it. And in order to do this, I should think ministers, above all person, ought to be much in secret prayer and fasting, and also much in praying and fasting one with another. It seems to me it would be becoming the circumstances of the present day, if ministers in a neighborhood would often meet together and spend days in fasting and fervent prayer among themselves, earnestly seeking for those extraordinary supplies of divine grace from heaven, that we need at this day.”* (Jonathan Edwards, Some Thoughts Concerning Revival, 507)

A. Unacceptable Fasting

1. Do not fast to be seen by others (Matt. 6:16-18)
 - a) He assumes we will fast; He doesn't say when or how often (vv. 6:16-17)
 - b) “Their reward” – temporal, it's worthless and fleeting (v. 18)
 - c) The fasting of the hypocrites was merely an outward mask of godliness since their inward desire was for the praises of men.
 - d) There is a difference between “fasting to be seen” (self-glorifying) and “being seen fasting” which is sometimes unpreventable (Piper, 74)
2. Do not fast out of obligation (Rom. 14:3-6; 1 Cor. 8:8; 1 Tim. 4:1-3)
 - a) Christianity is not about religion or legalism; it is about a relationship.
 - b) The Bible makes clear that even something right, done for the wrong reasons, is wrong (Matt. 15:8-9).
 - c) “This does not mean that to fast is to embrace legalism; it is gospel liberty which encourages us to deny ourselves (David R. Smith)
3. Do not fast only to ignore true obedience (Isa. 58)
 - a) Israel appeared to seek God (v. 2) but sought their own pleasures (v. 3)
 - b) God does not acknowledge a fast void of obedience
 - c) God desired Israel to fast by loosening the bond of wickedness (v. 6), caring for the poor and destitute (v. 7), feeding the hungry and satisfying the desire of the afflicted (v. 10).
4. Do not fast to prove your righteousness to God (Luke 18:9-14; Col. 2:20-23)
 - a) Fasting is not about asceticism, penance, or getting God's attention.
 - b) Fasting is not about trying to show God what a good person you are.
 - c) Fasting is not about harming yourself so that God will feel sorry for you.

B. A Paradigm Shift on Fasting (Matthew 9:14-17)

1. Fasting was normative for the religious culture of Jesus' day (v. 14)
2. Fasting was unnecessary while Jesus was present on earth (v. 15a)
3. Fasting would be necessary once Jesus was gone (v. 15b)
4. Old Testament Fasting (Old Garment and Old Wineskins) (vv. 16-17)
 - a) O.T. fasting was associated with mourning outwardly expressed through wearing sackcloth and ashes (cf. Isa. 58:5)
 - b) O.T fasting was a cry for deliverance and brokenness over sin
 - c) "It was an expression of broken heartedness and desperation, usually over sin or over some danger or some deeply longed-for blessing. It was something you did when things were not going the way you wanted them to" (Piper, 35)
 - d) The old system of fasting cannot be combined with the new because both will be destroyed (v. 17)
5. New Testament Fasting (unshrunk cloth and new wine) (vv. 16-17)
 - a) Jesus and the gospel are the unshrunk cloth and new wine
 - b) O.T. fasting focused on mourning for sin and deliverance from evil but did not take into account the gospel work of Christ
 - c) New fasting must take into account the finished work of Christ
 - d) In light of the gospel work of Christ (cross and resurrection), the issue of sin and evil are dealt with. Therefore, we fast to further embrace the reality of the fullness of Christ.
 - e) New fasting is tasting that Christ is good and desiring His immediate presence.

C.Characteristics of New Testament Fasting

1. Fasting declares that God Himself is more desired than His gifts

- a) Exemplified in Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22:11-12)
- b) "The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink every night...The greatest adversary of love to God is not his enemies but His gifts. And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasure of earth" (John Piper, A Hunger for God, 14)
- c) We have no room in our spiritual stomachs to eat and drink deeply of God because we have filled ourselves with the fleeting pleasures of this world.
 - (1) "If you don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great." (Piper, 23)
 - (2) The seed sown among the thorns didn't grow because it was choked out by the desires for other things (Mar 4:18-19)
- d) Fasting is not the forfeit of evil, but of good. Giving up evil is obedience. Fasting is giving up what is good for what is best – God Himself.
 - (1) Food which is good, is given up for a time for God who is better (Rom. 14:6)
 - (2) Sex which is good, is given up for a time for God who is better (1 Cor. 7:5)
- e) Fast from anything that grips our hearts more than God
 - (1) "Fasting is a test to see what desires control us" (Piper, 19)
 - (2) "Fasting if we conceive of it truly, must not...be confined to the question of food and drink; fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose. There are many bodily functions which are right and normal and perfectly legitimate, but which for special peculiar reasons in certain circumstances should be controlled. That is fasting (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Studies, in the Sermon on the Mount, 38).

2. Fasting is a fasting of Faith (Piper, 42)
 - a) Fasting is a God-given means to treasure the gospel more than the gifts of this world that I am daily tempted to make into gods (Piper, 62)
 - b) "Faith is a spiritual feasting on Christ with a view to being so satisfied in Him that the power of all other allurements is broken" (Piper, 42)
 - c) "Christian fasting is not self-wrought discipline that tries to deserve more from God. It is a hunger for God awakened by the taste of God freely given in the gospel." (Piper, 44)
 - d) We fast so that our faith in the gospel work of Jesus Christ is increased. We fast so that we will ache and yearn more for Christ's presence

3. Fasting declares contentment in Christ Alone.

- a) There is nothing on earth that I desire besides you (Ps. 73:25-26). Neither food nor anything else on earth can satisfy us—only God satisfies.
- b) Paul counted everything loss for the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:7-8)
- c) Fasting is a declaration that He is more desirable to us, and the only thing we truly need. We may die without food, but we will eternally perish without Jesus Christ.
- d) "The absence of fasting is indicative of our comfort with the way things are. The absence of fasting is the measure of our contentment with the absence of Christ" (Piper, 93)

D. The Purpose of Fasting

1. Fasting is for the purpose of knowing God Himself more deeply and fully
2. Fasting allows us to loosen our grip on the things of this world and to tighten our grip on the things of God (paraphrased from Andrew Murray)
3. "Fasting prevents luxuries from becoming necessities" (Anonymous)
4. Fasting is for the purpose of seeking spiritual direction from God (Acts 13:1-3).
5. "We fast out of longing for God's name to be known and cherished and honored, and out of longings for His kingly rule to be extended and then consummated in history, and out of longing for His will to be done everywhere with the same devotion and energy that the indefatigable angels do it sleeplessly in heaven forever and ever." (Piper, 78)